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ABSTRACT

This personal progress report, telling where the author is and where he thinks the field of reading is, is a response to both the "know-more movement" (based on an explosive seeking of greater knowledge of the reading process) and the "know-nothing movement" (a systems-oriented movement based on tightly structured arbitrarily chosen skill sequences). In response to the "know-more movement," the author summarizes the theory of reading he has developed, noting that he has described reading as interactive, psycholinguistic, active, constructive, and tentative. He then indicates how he sees current theory and research directions in relation to his theory, indicating his reaction to descriptions of his model as an "analysis by synthesis," top-down, and inside-out model, and telling how the schema concept fits with his theory. In response to the "know-nothing movement," the author outlines major aspects of a whole-language, comprehension-centered theory of reading instruction that he feels has demonstrated its effectiveness; the theory emphasizes continuous focus on meaning, legitimizing of risk taking, and continuous involvement of learners in reading and writing. Finally, he explains his reasons for rejecting the competency-based, highly structured approach of the "know-nothing movement." (GT)

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THE KNOW-MORE AND THE KNOW-NOTHING MOVEMENTS IN READING: A PERSONAL RESPONSE

by Kenneth S. Goodman

Reading, how it works, how it's learned, how to teach it, has never gotten more attention than it is getting now. Ironically, at the same time that more productive theory and research from a widening range of vantage points is producing new insights and knowledge, developments in reading instruction are dominated by reactionary backward looking pressures which lock teachers into arbitrary inflexible methods, curricula, and materials and lock-out knowledge and enlightenment.

In this brief presentation I want to respond to both movements: the know-more movement and the know-nothing movement. I can do this best, in the first case, by a restatement of the theory of reading I've been developing over the years, indicating how I see current theory and research directions relating to that theory. I can do it best in the second case by restating a theory of reading development and reading instruction which I feel are solidly supported through application in classrooms. In doing this it will be necessary to explicitly react to current trends and catch-phrases. In a sense, this is a personal progress report on where I am and where I think the field is.

The theory of the reading process I developed is still best summed up in the statement "Reading is a Psycholinguistic Guessing Game" (1967). I reached the conclusion that tentative information processing, guessing on the basis of minimal actual information is the primary characteristic of reading. The reader interacts with an author

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through a text to construct meaning. That means that there is an interaction between thought and language, hence a psycholinguistic process is in operation. Most recently, I've realized that the tentativeness of the information processing is even more significant than I had thought earlier.

The level of confidence of the reader at any point in time strongly effects the process. If the reader is unsure of the meaning being constructed, finds the text syntactically complex, the concept load heavy, or the concepts strange, then the reader becomes more tentative, more cautious, more careful. The reader uses more cues, monitors more closely, reprocesses frequently, corrects often. If the reader has a high level of confidence then the reading plunges forward with only minimal sampling and self monitoring.

Reading depends on the use of strategies for comprehending, that is constructing meaning in interaction with texts. Comprehending is seeking after meaning. Comprehension is what is, in fact, understood. The latter always is the combined result of what the reader understood prior to reading and the effectiveness of comprehending. The two will be related strongly, but even highly effective readers are severely limited in comprehension of texts by what they already know before they read. The author may influence the comprehensibility of a text particularly for specific targeted audiences. But no author can completely compensate in writing for the range of differences among all potential readers of a given text.

At the core of the theory I have developed is the view that language processes must be studied in the context of their use. If they are dissected, stopped or unnaturally constrained then the relative

significance of constituents to wholes is altered. Similarly long complete texts have characteristics that short texts, partial texts, or specially contrived texts can't have.

I've described reading as cyclical with optical, perceptual, syntactic and semantic cycles linking into each other. Again tentativeness is important. The reader's main preoccupation is with constructing meaning. While the reader must utilize all cycles, the confident reader moves through to syntactic prediction and semantic construction as quickly and easily as possible. Efficient reading uses the least amount of effort possible.

Schema are used on the basis of minimal perceptual information which make it possible to predict syntactic patterns and leap toward a sense of the text. Effective reading can only be defined in terms of comprehension. Proficient readers are both efficient and effective. Such readers get to meaning with minimal use of cues, minimal monitoring, confident prediction, minimal correction. Of course, proficient readers can shift to more cautious processing as their level of confidence drops. Proficient readers can also become non-proficient readers in coping with some texts.

Readers use the strategies of sampling, predicting, confirming, and correcting. These strategies depend on use of graphophonic, syntactic, and semantic cues as they are found in natural language texts. And again they function always in the context of the readers' striving to make sense of the text. The same cues which are used to confirm prior predictions are used to make subsequent ones. So as proficiency increases readers become highly selective in sampling available cues and highly effective in their predictions.

The difference between readers of different levels of proficiency is not in how this process works but how well it works. Less proficient readers can not construct meaning by a different process. They must use the same cues, cycles, strategies.

To say they read less well does not imply they are either devoid of skills or more careless, in fact they may read less well because they are too cautious, use too many cues, overuse some strategies, or have been taught non-productive strategies which may conflict with their more natural productive strategies.

The terms I've used to describe reading are interactive, psycholinguistic, active, constructive, tentative. Commentators on my view have applied other terms popular at various times.

For a while my model was being referred to as an "analysis by synthesis" model. (Gibson and Levin, 1975) As nearly as I can determine this term was used originally by Henri Bergson, the philosopher. It has some applicability, particularly since I do believe that no intermediate aspect of reading can be regarded as complete until meaning has been constructed, that we only "know" the parts when we've created meaning for the whole.

But I have never used the term because it is not explicit enough. Nor are either the terms analysis or synthesis really appropriate for what I see happening in the reading process.

My model has also been referred to as a top-down model. (Pearson and Kamil, 1978) Again the term is not totally inappropriate. I do believe language is learned from whole to part in full communicative contexts.

I also believe that processing in reading is meaning-seeking so that language parts have no real existence outside the whole.

But this term developed as an alternative to frankly bottom-up views, such as Gough's (1976) or (Laberge and Samuels, 1976). They see reading as processing each small part successively and accurately to get to each larger unit. For Gough "Merlin" puts the parts together into meaningful wholes. For Samuels automaticity does the trick. Learning to read, for bottom-up folks is also a matter of starting with small units and graduating to larger more real ones.

If the only alternative to a bottom-up view is a top-down view that's where my theory is often put because it surely is not bottom-up. But I've always seen parts in relationship to wholes. I've talked for some years about how use of distinctive features operates in language. I see optical and perceptual cycles preceding syntactic and semantic cycles.

Recent classifications of reading models create a third, interactive, category in which processing is simultaneous at many levels all interacting. That's where I've always placed my view. Rumelhart's (1977) work is cited as an example of an interactive model. I find little in his view incompatible with my own except that he is hesitant to fully integrate the aspects he discusses or to expand his view of reading comprehension to a full model of the reading process. Louise Rosenblatt (1978) has been using another term, transactional, taken from Dewey, to apply to the reading process. Like Dewey she prefers transactional because it implies a more complete involvement with each other, of text and reader, than does interaction.

Some psychologists discussing text analysis, such as Bonnie Meyer (1975), have used top-down to apply to the "story grammar" of the

text - placing more significant aspects of a story structure in a kind of pyramid dominating less significant aspects. She argues, in that sense, that the reader's comprehension is top-down, focussing on the dominating features of the structure.

Such a view is more related to how we select and organize what we comprehend from reading than to the reading process. A problem with many recent attempts at reading theory particularly that involving cognitive psychologists, has been a tendency to avoid macro-theories of the entire reading process. We get, instead, partial theories of text comprehension of propositional structures of texts, or of schema functioning.

It is very significant that much modern theory focuses around comprehension of meaning and falls broadly within a focus on the writer, the text, or the reader.

But all the findings and theories will eventually need to come together into an inclusive view. Though my theory has not been explicated in complete detail, since it is a macro-theory of the reading process it must accommodate research finding, provide alternate explanations if it cannot, or yield to a new, better theory. But there must be a macro-theory of reading and it must account for all aspects of the process and serve as a base of theories of reading development and reading instruction.

My theory is sometimes also referred to as an inside-out view. Such a view is contrasted with outside-in views. In the outside-in view reading is often called "text driven". The reader is seen as relatively passively responding to the text. Conversely reading is reader-driven in inside-out views with the reader operating actively and without dependence on the text.

Again if there are only two choices I'm at the inside-out pole. But I've never used these terms to describe my view. I believe that what the reader brings to the text is as important as what the author did in understanding the meaning a given reader constructs. I've said above that readers use all three cue systems in interaction with the text but that proficient reading uses minimal cues and minimal effort in reading. It follows that the more proficient the reader is the less constrained the reader is by close attention to text features. So I'd prefer again to call reading an interactive process -- one in which the reader interacts with the text.

I've referred above in passing to the reader's schema. The old concept that human interaction with our environment and learning depend on development of complex schema has become popular again in cognitive psychology. (Anderson et al, 1977) It has been applied recently to studies of comprehension of oral and written texts.

The schema view fits well with the concepts of sampling, predicting, confirming and correcting. The reader uses minimal cues to construct schema. These are not selected, I believe, from a mental file cabinet of preformed schema but rather rules are used to generate schema. In a sense the rules are schema for schema formation. The schema must utilize syntactic rules to generate (predict) the clauses and clausal relationships. They must also use semantic cohesion, semantic structures, sense of story to predict the meaning. The schema are not "instantiated" as some schema theorists have argued. Rather the details of the schema are predicted and monitored through confirming and disconfirming strategies. The reader, being always tentative to

some degree, is always prepared to modify or produce an alternate schema, to correct, seeking new perceptual information if necessary to achieve the constant goal of meaning construction.

Thus the schema concept is one highly compatible with my view of reading and useful in relating the comprehension of any text by any reader to an interaction of what the reader brings to the text, what the text characteristics are, and what the author has brought to it.

The systems of analysis of the semantic structures of text, which are rapidly developing, offer exciting possibilities for our understanding, in considerable detail, the semantic aspects of how readers construct meaning. A problem with many of these analyses is that they do not relate syntactic to semantic structures in any useful way. That again requires a fully articulated macro-theory such as mine. The macro-language theories of Michael Halliday (1973) offer promise as the most solid base for an understanding of how syntax and semantics relate in language processes.

At the beginning, I said there were two concurrent movements in reading. The first, which I described above, is the explosive seeking of greater knowledge of the reading process which I've called the know-more movement. There ought to be great excitement in the schools over the levels of activity in reading theory and research and the potential the knowledge produced has for application to better teaching and learning of reading.

Instead there is an overwhelming systems-oriented know-nothing movement which is based on tightly structured arbitrarily chosen skill sequences; it is an empty technology so inflexible it can not tolerate new knowledge.

I believe that a solidly based whole language, comprehension centered theory of reading instruction has emerged and demonstrated its effectiveness. Here, briefly, are some of the major aspects of this theory:

Literacy, reading and writing, is learned in the same way as oral language. If language learning is, as Halliday has said, learning how to mean, then literacy learning is learning how to mean with written language.

Though written language is comprehended in much the same way as oral language, its use to communicate over time and space create conditions that stretch out the development of written language as compared to oral language.

Children growing up in a literate society do begin development of literacy long before school begins. The roots of literacy are growing strongly long before schools begin instruction.

Children learn that print represents meaning. They learn general and specific meanings of specific print sequences in situational contexts: stop signs, cereal boxes, toothpaste cartons. At the same time, children develop some awareness of the form of print: directionality, letter names, key features. They distinguish print from pictures. They can handle books and know the basic function of books, letters, newspapers.

Literacy development in school needs to be built on this base. It must be seen as an extension of the natural development. It must always involve whole, real, natural, relevant texts. That means the classroom must be a literate environment where the teacher uses great

ingenuity to engage children in real functional written language to label, to chart, to inform, to stimulate imagination, to develop sense of story, of semantic text structure.

Language learning, literacy included, is self motivated if language is functional.

Early instruction can include a wide range of whole language activities; language experience stories, shared book experiences, read along activities with teachers and records, assisted reading. Writing can co-develop with reading if teachers can help to create a sense of expressive purpose and function. Interest must be kept high and the teacher must never lose sight of the fact that both reading and writing require active involvement of the learner.

People learn the form of language through its functional use. Nothing contributes so strongly and continuously to language development as experience in using language.

The three crucial factors in assuring development in reading and writing are:

Continuous focus on meaning

Legitimizing of risk-taking

Continuous involvement of learners in reading and writing.

Risk-taking is essential to development. We must try to use language before we know all we need to know to use it proficiently. Fine control of the processes and their components develop through gross attempts. We accept that in oral development,"baby talk" charms us. But in written development we've been put off by reading miscues and invented spellings.

Literacy can develop best in a classroom that encourages use and accepts progress without expecting perfection.

If children are reading whole functional materials they will develop strategies for using cues efficiently in relation to their value in getting to meaning.

Literacy learners must be treated with respect. Children bring their language competence and their ability to learn language to development of literacy. We must rid ourselves of the pathological pre-occupation with weakness in learners and take the positive view of building on strength.

Language also must be treated with respect. It's neither an inscrutable mystery nor an unyielding straight-jacket on expression. It's a marvelous tool people are universally equipped to develop and use. Like all language learning, developing literacy should be easy and pleasurable. It can be if it isn't fractionated into arbitrarily sequenced abstract skills.

If reading development is, as I believe, a natural extension of oral language development in the context of developing functions, then remedial reading is a matter of refocusing non-productive readers and getting those readers to revalue the reading process and their own reading ability.

Readers who are non-productive tend to be in conflict with themselves. They are victims of over-skill trying to remember skill strategies they've been taught while they struggle to make sense.

Getting them to abandon the "next-word syndrome", the ingrained belief that every word must be accurately named, is a major step.

Each failure to get the next word is a defeat to such readers and proof to themselves that they will never succeed. In most cases they have strengths they can draw on, natural comprehension strategies, but they think of them as cheating since they have been developed independent of instruction. Such revaluing takes time, patience, and skilled support from a teacher.

Successful reading teachers, whether developmental or remedial, must be well informed about the processes of reading and learning to read. They must be proficient "kid-watchers", able to monitor the progress of pupils and see their strengths and problems in action. They must be able to stimulate pupils to read and write. Such teachers build the self reliance of learners in their own strategies and their ability to use them flexibly. They build a love of reading and writing.

Now if we examine the features of this whole language comprehension centered approach I've outlined, we can see that it has little compatibility with the know-nothing movement.

Literacy in this competency-based, highly structured, empty-technology is reduced to a tight sequence of arbitrary skills. The teacher becomes a technician, part of a "delivery system". The children become passive interchangeable recipients of technological treatments to be pretested, exercised, and posttested. The classroom is an industrial assembly line. Learning is reduced to gain scores on paper and pencil tests. There is much in the know-nothing movement I must reject.

I must reject the skill sequences as arbitrary and baseless. I must reject the "mastery learning" programs as unfounded in learning theory, empty of language content, dull and dehumanizing and subject to the ancient law of diminishing returns. I must reject "direct

teaching" as contradictory to much of what we know of language learning. I must reject legally mandated minimal competency requirements as irrelevant to the realities of literacy achievement and punitive to the students they are supposed to help. I must reject simplistic phonics programs and other assorted back-to-basics propositions as reactionary, negative and rooted in ignorance and superstition. I must reject the evaluation establishment which dominates the teaching of literacy through tests. I must reject the federal and state guidelines which mandate tests and technology and lock out knowledge and humanity.

In all this, however, I remain an optimist. I believe in truth, wisdom, teachers and learners. I believe that eventually we shall overcome the know-nothing movement and then indeed we will find the strength in knowledge to build the literacy programs we need.

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